



Colchester Housing Forum

Thursday, April 28th
7:00-9:00 pm
Meeting House

Sponsored by the
Colchester Planning Commission

For more information, please contact
the Colchester Planning Department:
654-0719

Where will our children and our parents live?

A regional housing shortage is affecting Colchester – making it harder for local workers, young families, and seniors to find affordable housing in the area.

In 2004, Colchester was awarded Municipal Planning Grant from the VT Department of Housing and Community Affairs to identify:

- local housing needs, and
- strategies the town can pursue to help meet those needs.

An initial assessment of the town's housing stock – and population, employment and market trends that affect our community – was completed in January and presented at our first public forum.

The town then hosted a “focus group” of housing providers – including local realtors, developers and builders, housing advocates and local officials – to gain their perspectives on the community's housing needs, and to identify barriers to new housing development.

Your help is needed!

Draft recommendations, based on initial findings, forum and focus groups recommendations, are now available for public comment. *Please join us on April 28th for a presentation and discussion!*

Housing Highlights...

- Colchester ranks third in the state for total number of housing units. In 2000, there were 6,727 units in town –11.4% of the county total. Since then the town, on average, has issued permits for 88 new units per year – including a mix of single and multi-family units.
- Many local homes date from the 1960s and 70s, when the town underwent a period of rapid development. As a result, much of the existing housing stock consists of modest, relatively affordable homes. New houses being built, however, are considerably larger and more expensive, reflecting current market trends.
- While houses are getting bigger, local households are shrinking – by 2000, single- and two-person households comprised 56% of all households in town. Of those living alone, 22% were seniors (65+ years).
- A region-wide housing shortage is affecting the cost of local housing– sale prices have increased 47% since 2000, following regional trends. In 2004, the median price of single family homes sold in Colchester was \$225,600 – only slightly less than the county median of \$232,000.
- Housing is affordable for most current homeowners and renters but, due to rising housing costs in relation to wages and income, it is increasingly less affordable for those on fixed incomes or who are now entering the housing market.

Needs...

Local estimates, based on available population and employment projections, suggest the need for an additional 420 to 1020 housing units between 2000 and 2010. In order to meet regional housing needs, the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission has recommended a target of 1,270 units for Colchester over the same period –20% of which should be affordable to low and moderate income households.

1. **Accommodate anticipated demand.** *In order to meet anticipated housing needs, the town will have to find ways to support new construction, and increased demand for municipal facilities and services.*
2. **Retain the existing supply of modestly-priced housing.** *While the town cannot control regional housing demand, it should seek to ensure that the impact of that demand on existing housing prices is minimized.*
3. **Ensure that new construction includes modestly-priced dwellings.** *There is a need for affordable starter homes, priced at \$225,000 or less, which will need to be met in part through new construction. Affordable rental and condo units for newly formed and “downsizing” households are also needed.*
4. **Provide additional, and more varied, housing options for seniors.** *Maturing households need access to a variety of housing options – ranging from smaller apartments and condos to assisted living and residential care facilities.*

Challenges...

Many communities face a variety of challenges that make it difficult to address local housing needs. In Colchester, the following existing or potential obstacles have been identified:

1. **Lack of available building lots.** *There are currently few new housing lots available for development in town. This increases the cost of land and limits the number of units – especially affordable units – that can be built.*
2. **Lack of wastewater capacity.** *All new housing development in Colchester must rely on in-ground septic systems, which require lower densities of development that do not support the construction of modestly-priced housing.*
3. **Uncertain or complicated regulations.** *Small developers have indicated that the permitting process under local and state regulations is too complicated. Larger developers have suggested that the process takes too long – costing more time and money.*
4. **Excessive public works standards.** *Developers claim that the town’s current public works standards may impose unnecessary costs on new residential development.*
5. **Negative attitudes toward higher density and “affordable” housing.** *These include beliefs that such housing will adversely affect neighboring property values and community character. Public opposition to housing projects can result in permit denials, or conditions and delays that increase housing costs.*

Opportunities...

Recommended strategies, highlighted below, have been identified in **draft form**, for public discussion and further consideration by the Planning Commission:

Planning Initiatives:

- Identify targeted rates of housing development in the municipal plan, including the percentage of low and moderate income units.
- Evaluate the capacity of proposed growth centers to accommodate anticipated housing.

Infrastructure Initiatives:

- Evaluate and update the town’s comprehensive wastewater management plan to address targeted rates of housing growth, particularly within designated growth centers.
- Continue to evaluate options for developing and financing centralized wastewater system capacity – through inter-municipal agreements and/or the development of a municipal system.
- Adopt a wastewater allocation ordinance that allocates future reserve capacity for residential development and affordable housing.

Regulatory Initiatives

Review and update existing municipal regulations (zoning, subdivision, fire, public works standards) to:

- Accommodate targeted rates and densities of housing development in desired locations.
- Provide incentives for affordable housing.
- Streamline the development review process.

Public Outreach & Partnership Initiatives

- Create a local housing task force to increase public awareness of local housing needs and options.
- Enter into partnerships with local housing providers to develop affordable housing.
- Continue to participate in regional housing efforts.

